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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0075  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0127  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0061  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3790  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2066  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0163  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0735  
RUEAORC/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2213  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 002178

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DEPT FOR INL FOR ANDREW BUHLER, EXBS FOR JEFF HARTSHORN,  
AND SCA/CEN  
DUSHANBE FOR INL RANJEET SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/27/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [EAID](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: INL EQUIPMENT BOLSTERS CUSTOMS OFFICERS IN BORDER  
PROVINCE

REF: TASHKENT 2162

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley and Steve Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (B  
) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Poloffs traveled to Termez, a strategic city on the Uzbek-Afghan border, from December 17-19 and presented INL-funded equipment to the Surkhandaryo Province's Customs Chief Shavkat Mukhamadeev. He was grateful for the USG assistance, which was based on a needs assessment visit by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials in February ¶2007. Specific equipment provided included 100 rechargeable flashlights and 200 utility toolkits, with a total value of USD 20,000. The strategic province borders Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Mukhamadeev reported that a majority of all narcotics seizures in Uzbekistan take place in this province. He also frankly described some deficiencies in recent border security projects on the Uzbek-Afghan border, including malfunctioning truck scales and an inability to retrieve CCTV data. He added that Afghanistan is "becoming a better neighbor" and noted increasing signs of legitimate commerce between Surkhandaryo and Uzbekistan. End summary.

#### Equipment Bolsters Capabilities

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¶2. (U) Poloffs traveled to Termez to participate in a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) border project closure ceremony (reftel) and to transfer INL-funded equipment to regional Customs officials. During the official equipment transfer on December 17 poloffs had a rare opportunity to talk extensively with a high-ranking field official about Customs activities in the region as well as recent trends. Specific equipment provided included 100 rechargeable flashlights (as well as spare parts) and 200 multipurpose utility toolkits. The total value of the donation exceeds USD 20,000, and an additional quantity of flashlights with a value of approximately USD 10,000 was

subsequently transferred to the Customs headquarters in Tashkent. Mukhamadeev seemed genuinely happy about the equipment donation and said it will immediately be deployed to Customs officers in the field to bolster their interdiction capability. He recently began his duties at this post in Surkhandaryo, and the transfer of useful equipment was an excellent way to establish a good working relationship with this important contact. Other Customs officials who were present appreciated that the USG followed up on the needs assessment visit conducted by CBP experts nearly one year ago, when the need for this specific equipment was identified.

#### A Strategic Province

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¶3. (SBU) Surkhandaryo Province has been strategic since ancient times, and in the modern geopolitical context it borders Afghanistan to the south, Tajikistan to the east, and Turkmenistan to the west. Whereas Uzbekistan's Afghan border runs entirely along the Amu Daryo River and has been heavily defended since Soviet times, Mukhamadeev noted that the rugged border with Tajikistan has become an increasingly common transit route for the smuggling of narcotics from Afghanistan. There are both road and rail ports of entry from Tajikistan, and he proudly described a six kilo drug seizure made by his staff the previous week. He said he personally participates in random nighttime inspections of rural Customs posts to keep his officers on their toes, and he added that "they have warm clothes and good morale." In addition to narcotics, he noted that they have occasionally seized some weapons.

¶4. (C) Mukhamadeev said that activity on the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan has been limited in recent years, but he noted that there has been a burst of activity to rehabilitate border checkpoints with Turkmenistan. He noted that, as a result of President Karimov's recent productive bilateral meeting with Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov, Uzbek officials are expecting an increase in cross-border activity with Turkmenistan.

#### International and Interagency Cooperation

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¶5. (C) Mukhamadeev remarked that Customs has received training from other states, including Austria and Germany, but Customs officials do not have any counternarcotics cooperation with counterparts in Afghanistan or Tajikistan. He also noted that Customs works regularly with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Security Service (NSS). Once or twice per year, Customs delivers all of the drugs it has seized to the NSS, which burns them, he said.

#### Some Glitches

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¶6. (C) While Mukhamadeev gushed with praise for UNODC's border security projects (of which the U.S., of course, is a major donor), he pointed out some deficiencies that need to be addressed for the projects to be fully effective. In particular, he noted the large truck scales installed at the Hayraton facility malfunctioned almost immediately and are entirely unreliable. This results in longer inspection times and also limits the ability of customs officers to identify suspicious vehicles. Another significant problem is that, despite a sophisticated CCTV system with 57 cameras, there is no one in Uzbekistan -- including leading Tashkent-based contractors -- who have the skills to retrieve the data. This limits the ability of officers to access archived digital footage from the port-of-entry during investigations. Poloffs passed this information along to UNODC staff during the Hayraton border project closure ceremony on December 18 (reftel).

#### Request for More Training and Equipment

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¶7. (C) Mukhamadeev said that additional training programs for customs officers in his province would be very useful and welcome. In particular, he cited a need for training on the "Rapid Scan" x-ray equipment that UNODC provided, which approximately 35% of his officers know how to operate. However, due to frequent rotations among the 300 customs officers assigned to Surkhandaryo Province, they are already encountering situations when an insufficient number of adequately trained personnel are on duty. Mukhamadeev also expressed interest in receiving more advanced technologies, including x-ray machines, to improve Customs' capabilities.

Licit Commerce on the Rise, Too  
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¶8. (C) While much of the focus in Uzbekistan is on curbing illicit narcotics smuggling from Afghanistan, Customs officers in this strategic but isolated border region have noticed an increase in legitimate commerce across the "Dustlik" (Friendship) Bridge. Poloffs observed a surprising number of Afghanistan license plates on cars throughout the border city of Termez, indicating that private Afghan citizens are doing cross-border business. This is welcome connectivity for a city that is remote even by Uzbek standards in what has long been regarded as a sensitive military zone, and residents of Surkhandaryo share the same

language as their ethnic Uzbek kinsmen in northern Afghanistan.

¶9. (C) Poloffs also watched as a large truck bringing a cargo of Pakistani mandarins was inspected at the Hayraton checkpoint (reftel), an example of overland trade that was not feasible a few years ago. Mukhamadeev said that, gradually, Afghanistan "is becoming a better neighbor." However, in the meantime, it still takes between 30 minutes and three hours for a truck to complete the border crossing procedures, depending on how suspicious the Uzbek officials are of the cargo.

Comment  
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¶10. (C) The timing of our visit allowed us to present highly desired equipment to a newly-appointed official in Surkhandaryo at a time when the GOU is frequently hinting at a desire for greater cooperation on border security. Mukhamadeev's willingness to engage in a frank discussion during our first meeting is a positive sign that our relationship can readily expand in the law enforcement and border security spheres. His comments -- as well as our own observations -- on budding commerce with Afghanistan demonstrate that more than just drugs are reaching Uzbekistan from the south, which may help ancient Silk Road cities like Termez rediscover their raison d'etre.

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